



Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Independent Advocacy Service

What is the Independent Advocacy Service?

It is a free and independent service available to people with a disability who may need extra support to access and apply for Social Security Scotland benefits.

This service is provided by VoiceAbility, an organisation outside of Scottish Government and Social Security Scotland. VoiceAbility is a charity and has been delivering independent advocacy services for 40 years.

Who can use the service?

The service is open to anyone in Scotland with a disability who needs support to access and apply for Social Security Scotland's benefits. This could include people with a sensory disability, mental health condition or learning disability.

The service is also available to parents or carers with a disability who need support to access benefits for a child. Or for parents or carers who are accessing benefits for a child with a disability, if the child wants to be involved in the process and needs support.

What does an advocate do?

An advocate can help people with a disability to:

- be heard and understood
- ask questions and get information about benefits
- understand what benefits they can apply for
- understand how to apply for benefits
- understand the service they can expect and what to do if they have questions
- understand letters, application forms, phone calls and meetings with Social Security Scotland
- be fully involved in the application process
- tell Social Security Scotland about themselves, their situation and what they want or need
- tell Social Security Scotland what they think about their benefits and the service they get and understand what to do if they are not happy.

An advocate will:

- find out how a person finds it easiest to understand and get their message across
- communicate with the client in a way that they find easiest
- only speak or write for a client when the client asks them to or when the client can't speak or write
- get information from other people to help a client express their views. They will only do this if the client tells them they can, unless the client is unable to give consent
- protect a client's rights by representing their situation if they are unable to.

What does an advocate not do?

An advocate will not:

- provide advice about benefits
- offer legal advice
- make decisions for the client
- share their own views or opinions.

When can someone access the service?

Clients can ask for the support of an advocate at any time – before they apply, when they apply, if they want to challenge the outcome of their application, or make a complaint.

How does someone access the service?

Clients can contact VoiceAbility directly for free on 0300 303 1660, by visiting www.voiceability.org, or by emailing SocialSecurityAdvocacy@voiceability.org.

Clients can also access this support by contacting Social Security Scotland for free in the way that best suits them, either:

- by phone, on 0800 182 2222 and asking to be referred to the Independent Advocacy Service
- by web chat
- by Text Relay Service on 18001 +0300 244 4000
- or British Sign Language users can go to contactscotland-bsl.org/device-direct

What happens next?

After a client gets in touch, an advocate from VoiceAbility will contact them in a way that suits the client best within five working days. The advocate will then communicate with the client to find out their needs.

The service is entirely free to clients, and any travel costs to access the service will be reimbursed by VoiceAbility.